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TAGS: [PREL](#) [BM](#) [TH](#) [BURMA](#) [ASEAN](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADORS HILL AND BOYCE CALL ON NEW THAI
FOREIGN MINISTER

Classified By: CHARGE ALEX ARVIZU. REASON 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: A/S Designate for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Christopher Hill, accompanied by Ambassador Boyce, met with new Thai Foreign Minister Kanthati Suphamongkhon on March 30. Ambassador Hill told Kanthati that the U.S. remains committed to the six-party process in nuclear negotiations with North Korea. On Burma, Ambassador Hill told Kanthati that Bangkok's engagement with Rangoon could be perceived by the SPDC as a sign of weakness. He highlighted to Kanthati that Burma's assumption of the ASEAN chair next year absent democratic progress is highly problematic. Ambassador Boyce added that Thailand is viewed in many quarters in the U.S. as defying ASEAN efforts to confront Rangoon over what it needs to do if it hopes to take the ASEAN chair. Kanthati said that Thailand was not willing "to jump quickly" to the public stance by Malaysia that Burma should be suspended from the ASEAN chair if it did not proceed with democratic reforms. On the matter of dealing with violence in Thailand's south, Kanthati said that the RTG is determined to use due legal process to prosecute both violent separatists and security personnel who resort to unauthorized force. End Summary.

APPRECIATION OVER TSUNAMI COOPERATION

¶2. (U) After congratulating Kanthati on his new appointment, Ambassadors Hill and Boyce noted the good ties enjoyed by Thailand and the U.S. and specifically the close cooperation between the two countries in the recent tsunami disaster that hit the region. This is a direct manifestation of the long-term "special relationship" between the two countries, Kanthati agreed.

NORTH KOREA

¶3. (C) Ambassador Hill told Kanthati the U.S. remains committed to the six party process, but North Korea is obdurate, choosing instead to obsess on details such as the Secretary's comments characterizing Pyongyang as an "outpost

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of tyranny." He added that he expects China to understand that it too has a lot invested in the six-party process. On our part, we are seriously committed to making this work, said Ambassador Hill. Kanthati wondered aloud why, in the wake of the U.S. action in Iraq, North Korea didn't "get it." Libya saw the writing on the wall, Kanthati continued, but North Korea has reacted very differently from Qaddafi to ward off potential blows, with Kim Jong Il deciding to use bluster and announce that his country is armed with nuclear weapons.

BURMA

¶4. (C) Noting that Thailand lives in a "rough neighborhood," Ambassador Hill asked Kanthati about Thailand's policy towards Burma. Kanthati likened Thailand's "constructive engagement" policy to U.S. policy towards China during the period when it tried to draw Beijing out from its dangerous isolation. Burma has gotten used to international isolation from all the years of sanctions, Kanthati said, and will not change until it is brought out and given a greater role. Kanthati offered that the coming chairmanship of ASEAN could induce the regime to make some gestures, such as releasing more political prisoners. Thailand will consult with its ASEAN counterparts and, of course, the "US and other friends," said Kanthati. Referring to public Malaysian statements about suspending the normal rotation of Burma next year into the ASEAN chairmanship unless Rangoon proceeds with democratic reforms, Kanthati said that Thailand is not willing to "jump too quickly" to this stance, preferring its ongoing engagement with Rangoon.

¶5. (C) Ambassador Hill said that as a diplomat he is usually a proponent of engagement, but in this case the regime in Rangoon may consider the Thai eagerness to engage as a sign of weakness. Ambassador Boyce pointed out that the image of Thailand on this issue in many quarters in the United States is bad -- while ASEAN appears to be moving to deal with Burma and the chairmanship issue, Thailand seems to be going against the current by maintaining its engagement policy with the SPDC. Ambassador Hill also stressed that it is a problem that next year Burma is slated to take ASEAN's chair and host a series of high-level conferences, a problem

that will have to be confronted and addressed. Kanthati acknowledged that this was a dilemma.

SOUTHERN THAILAND ISSUE

16. (C) Ambassador Hill asked Kanthati for his assessment of the situation in Southern Thailand. Kanthati said that the violence grows out of action by separatist extremists and reaction by local commanders. He said that the RTG is determined to use due legal process against both violent separatists and government security personnel who exercise unauthorized force. Referring to the mass deaths of Muslim Thai demonstrators under custody last year at Tak Bai, Kanthati said that the RTG had established a commission to look at the actions of individuals and to fix responsibility. "Like your situation at Abu Ghraib, a few individuals went too far," he added.

17. (C) Kanthati explained that the RTG will exercise a "soft approach," emphasizing development and economic opportunity in the troubled provinces. "We will not let religion be a divider," he said. Kanthati noted that Achmad Hasyim Muzadi, the Chairman of the Indonesian mass Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), was in Thailand at the RTG's invitation to visit the southern provinces, speak with Thai Muslims, and to give his own evaluation of the situation and ways to address it. "We are engaged and totally transparent" in our search for a solution to the southern violence," Kanthati concluded. (Note: Ambassador Hill met separately with Achmad Hasyim Muzadi in Bangkok (septel) End Note.)

18. (SBU) At the end of the call, Kanthati expressed the hope that Secretary Rice will visit Thailand in the near future. Ambassador Hill told Kanthati that he would relay the invitation.

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